



Storrow Drive Tunnel Project

Summary of Public Meetings February 13 and 15, 2006

Two Public Meetings were conducted to introduce the **Storrow Drive Tunnel Project** to the public: on Monday, 2/13 in Gardner Auditorium at the State House and on Wednesday, 2/15 in the Shriner's Hospital Auditorium.

The same general format and PowerPoint presentations were employed for these meetings. The agenda included:

- Opening Remarks, *Commissioner Stephen Burrington*;
- Project Introduction and PowerPoint Presentation, *Karl Haglund*, DCR Regional Planner;
- Review and Discussion of the Draft Criteria for Selecting a Preferred Option, led by *Karl Haglund*;
- Participant questions and discussion.

Paul Kelley, Simpson Gumpertz & Heger, Inc., participated in the discussion section of the meetings as the project consultant, addressing engineering issues raised by the audience.

A copy of the PowerPoint presentation is available on DCR's website (or is attached to this summary).

Commissioner Stephen Burrington opened each meeting with similar remarks. The Commissioner said that DCR views the project as both a transportation and a park improvement project that should leave the park in better condition than it is today. He invited all of the meeting participants to think creatively and participate in an open and collaborative process. Routing traffic through the Esplanade is not an option for him, and the City of Boston and Massachusetts Highway Department (MHD) will oversee traffic rerouting during construction. MHD will manage the construction and work with the city

to implement approved traffic detours and changes. Commissioner Burrington invited legislators, city officials, environmental, business and neighborhood activists and all other interested parties to participate in a year-long process to examine, test and refine the best option.

Commissioner Burrington introduced Karl Haglund, author of *Inventing the Charles River*, a history of the river and watershed, to present the project.

Public Meeting Summary

Gardner Auditorium, State House, Boston

February 13, 2006, 6:30 PM

PowerPoint Presentation

Discussion/Comments Summary

Karl Haglund opened the meeting for questions and discussion

- Rep. Marty Walz addressed the audience and thanked everyone for coming. She thanked DCR as well for establishing a responsive process for the parties to use to work together and encouraged everyone to participate, ask questions and stay involved.
- A resident asked about the limits of the tunnel option. Would DCR have an expanded view of where the portals would be located, for example, lengthening the tunnel so that more of the traffic is underground? Can some of the traffic using Storrow Drive be diverted on to the Mass. Turnpike? Karl Haglund said that is a question for the community and would be a good comment for the MEPA process. Paul Kelley added some information on the options, including the limited amount of space for more side-by-side lanes and the effectiveness of the current configuration.
- A participant asked why Storrow Drive couldn't have short tunnels like the ones on Memorial Drive. Mr. Kelley explained that there isn't sufficient space to put all of the lanes side-by-side. He reviewed the tunnel configuration (eastbound traffic is currently positioned below westbound traffic.)
- How does the plan to repair Storrow Drive correspond with the work on Memorial Drive? The speaker pointed out that many trees were destroyed to do the lane work. Mr. Kelley said that Memorial Drive could handle some of the traffic that will have to be diverted from Storrow Drive during construction. The consultants are working on getting information on capacity for the Mass. Turnpike.
- A participant commented that DCR should work with city, regional and state planners to understand the regional traffic dynamics and take advantage of this project to implement smart choices. The state needs to carefully phase various transportation projects being planned in the area.
- A participant asked if there are hazardous or dangerous substances, such as asbestos, to be removed from the tunnel. There are sensitive people and receptors – children on the Esplanade, parents with strollers, bicyclists, schools, etc. - nearby. DCR has to be sensitive to these issues and the criteria should reflect this need, not just a cost benefit analysis. Mr. Kelley said that will definitely be part of the design plan. He gave an example: there is lead paint on the steel beams at the Otter St. exit leading to Arlington St. Rather than remove the paint on site, the consultant will recommend that the beams be removed and discarded, with new, pre-painted beams to be installed. Mr. Haglund added that protecting public health will be addressed directly and clearly.

- A member of the audience asked if public comment will influence the process at all and how DCR plans to fund the project. Mr. Haglund assured the audience that the process is intended to make choices, decision points and opportunities for participating and comment very clear and accessible to the community. A great deal more information on the range of alternatives is being prepared and will be presented at the next set of meetings. On funding, Mr. Haglund said that the Storrow Drive Tunnel Project is one of seven covered by an agreement between DCR and the Massachusetts Highway Department (MHD) that will be funded by state transportation bonds. The current options can be managed in the context of this agreement. Commissioner Burrington added that increasing the cost to a much higher level – such as \$100 million or more – could move the project into the realm of a political budget discussion. The questioner asked if the options under discussion can be done to the satisfaction of DCR and MHD. Commissioner Burrington responded that MHD has recently completed work on new development design guidelines that outline intense community involvement and environmental review.
- A commenter noted that the project provides an opportunity for improved planning to make public transportation more attractive. He used the example of commuter trains leaving from North Station at 6:15, 7:30, 10 PM and midnight as poorly planned scheduling that makes evening travel difficult. It is an ideal time to push the MBTA and others to develop more user friendly rail service. Mr. Haglund replied that this is the kind of comment that MEPA needs to hear at each stage of the process. Commissioner Burrington added that alternatives were developed during the Big Dig, such as South Shore ferry service, that could be part of a package of alternatives considered now.
- A member of the audience said that the solution chosen should be attractive and convenient and permit cars to reach local businesses.
- Will the DCR commission a destination study? Mr. Kelley said he is talking to consultants about doing the work now.
- A resident asked if the Storrow Drive Tunnel is actually safe enough for the next 18 months. Mr. Kelley said there is no immediate danger. The tunnel was just inspected and the consultants are watching spots that may need attention.
- Returning to the topic of traffic management, a speaker suggested that during the construction, tolls be removed at the Allston-Brighton exit to encourage drivers to stay on the Mass. Turnpike instead of getting off for Storrow Tunnel. Mr. Haglund said it is a very reasonable idea to look at the vehicles using that exit and to consider alternatives. Mr. Kelley added that the consultants are in the process of getting more current information on the use of Memorial Drive, Charles River Road, Soldier's Field Road, the Mass. Turnpike, etc., to find out what is the current demand to capacity ratio.
- A speaker suggested that the planners need to keep in mind the possibility of the use of evacuation routes in the city. Shutting down Storrow Drive would impact these emergency procedures.
- A participant asked if the cost of maintenance will be considered in assessing the options. Mr. Kelley said he believes the at-grade options are more economical than the tunnels but the tunnels carry more vehicles and disrupt parkland less, at

least during construction. The final answer depends on the value of the criteria and uses.

- How long would it take to repair the tunnel in place? Mr. Kelley estimated 19-24 months. The work includes ripping off the roof, removing and replacing concrete (the tunnel was discovered to be buoyant during its original construction and the contractor added weight – concrete – to the roof, which affected the bearing weight). New steel beams are required and the eastbound tunnel needs to be relined, including new walls, floor and concrete.
- Former MDC Commissioner John Sears encouraged the agency and planners to include ingenuity in their calculations. He shared some anecdotes about previous efforts to find new and better options for problem solving.
- Peter Thomson of the Beacon Hill Civic Association said that the association will be making comments. He encouraged DCR to consider ways to recover aspects of the Esplanade that have been lost, to include mitigation and ensure that residents of Beacon Hill and the Back Bay have easy access to the park. Mr. Thomson suggested that a vision for the next 50 years of use is essential, even if it means there are some short-term hardships. Mr. Haglund said that in addition to looking at vehicle movement during construction, DCR plans to provide temporary access for pedestrians during construction.
- Elliott Laffer, Groundwater Trust, thanked DCR for including the criteria of maintaining or improving groundwater given its importance to Back Bay. He asked if among the alternatives under consideration there is a possibility to make some gains in groundwater. Mr. Kelley replied that tunnels always present more of a risk to groundwater distribution, and there is, on balance, more stability with an at-grade roadway. He is confident that the final design will not allow even a temporary depletion of groundwater and will take advantage of any opportunity to improve the situation after construction is complete.
- Rep. Walz suggested that DCR look at some of the planning done in conjunction with the Democratic Convention, which included traffic studies.
- A resident said that a full traffic study needs to be done and one of his goals is to prevent Storrow Drive from being used as an interstate highway. The at-grade or parkway options will have the practical effect of slowing speeds and reducing the number of drivers who choose Storrow Drive over other options.
- Another resident expressed serious concern about the flyover options. She said they are visually unsatisfactory. Karl Haglund said that DCR felt it was important to bring all of the potential options to the public for comment. The resident said she appreciates the breadth of the discussion. She asked if the Esplanade itself has reached capacity in terms of hosting events. She hopes that DCR will consider how to distribute some of the burden to other parks around the city and will consider how the Esplanade can be better cared for, used and appreciated by DCR and the neighbors.
- Another participant suggested that the rules of supply and demand should be applied to transportation, including higher user fees for transportation, which is under-priced. Mr. Haglund said that DCR and the consultants are looking at a wide variety of options, including ideas about the Allston-Brighton tolls, better use of Easy Passes, how and where vehicles leave the Turnpike, etc.

- Mr. Sears added that in his view, recent uses of the Hatch Shell have violated the provisions of the gift of the space from Mrs. Hatch and there is no reason to continue to violate those guidelines.
- Another resident suggested that speed limits on Storrow Drive should be enforced, which might reduce traffic. Mr. Haglund said that DCR will look at the differential between speed and capacity. He and Mr. Kelley said that further information on level of service on Storrow Drive and the Mass. Turnpike will have to be deferred to the end of March, when this kind of information should be available.
- Another commenter thanked DCR for the information and the opportunity to comment. He hopes that the dialogue will continue to reflect clear thinking about public benefits and the inconveniences, but the discussion should be framed in a regional context. Impacts, such as what happens to Mass. Ave., for example, need to be considered.
- Chris Porter asked if it is reasonable to get to an FEIR sooner than 2007. Mr. Haglund said DCR is taking a hard look at scheduling, particularly since there are other repairs, such as Longfellow Bridge, on similar schedules. Commissioner Burrington said the schedule is pretty compressed, but he is comfortable with DCR's ability to handle it. Mr. Porter asked about other projects and maintenance, such as the walkway system on Soldier's Field Road and beyond – there are hazards that need attention as well as quick repairs. Mr. Haglund said that DCR is aware of the need to make repairs outside the zone of construction and they are not being ignored.
- Another resident suggested that bike paths should be promoted on the Esplanade with signage that separates bicyclists from amblers.
- Commissioner Burrington noted in response to the previous comments that the pathway system from Boston to Watertown is not in the shape it should be in. DCR is assembling the talent it needs as part of its reorganization to address this issue.
- Linda Cox, an Esplanade advocate, reminded the audience of the history of the site, which was transformed from mud flats to a world-class park. It took generations, time and effort to transform the land. The Esplanade is a legacy, sacred ground that DCR and the community now have an opportunity to improve and enhance.

Public Meeting Summary
Shriner's Hospital Auditorium, Boston
February 15, 2006, 6:30 PM

PowerPoint Presentation
Discussion/Comments Summary

Karl Haglund opened the meeting for comments and questions.

- Rep. Marty Walz said that she represents the neighborhoods that will be impacted by the project. She thanked DCR for its responsiveness, noting that suggestions made at earlier meetings have already been included in the presentation tonight. Because the neighborhood and groups will be working on this project for years, she hopes that everyone will remain committed to listening and responding in a productive process.
- Don Carlson of the Sierra Club said he was delighted by the open process and access to decision makers. Relative to the proposed criteria, he asked how traffic would be diverted from Storrow Drive during construction and questioned the wording on “restoring” the Esplanade without any further definition of the term (will there be no loss or, for example, will it ultimately be expanded?). Mr. Haglund responded that the consultants are still collecting traffic data and examining effects and that data will be available during the next set of meetings in March. Addressing the Esplanade, Mr. Haglund said that the tunnel options present the most obvious opportunity to increase the Esplanade land, but in the short-term, they could impact the landscape, which can be restored. That level of detail is still being prepared and will also be available in March. Commissioner Burrington added that there may be no net loss of parkland under some of the options. DCR will document potential gains and losses in March, and people will have more information to inform their comments. Mr. Carlson suggested that the criteria should include a goal to “control pollution,” a suggestion that DCR accepted.
- Paul Finnegan said that he has lived for 36 years on Beacon Hill, 26 of them on Otis Place, where he will spend many of the next few years living about 25 feet from the tunnel project construction. He encouraged the engineers to work on creative solutions, hoping, for example, that engineering could create a view for the neighborhood at Clarendon St. He hopes that the lagoon is left alone and thinks that the flyover options are revolting and will never happen.
- Ron Newman is a resident of Davis Square in Somerville and is a pedestrian and bicyclist who uses the Longfellow Bridge to reach the city and esplanade. He suggested that the tunnel project and bridge reconstruction should not be scheduled at the same time. Mr. Newman said he was surprised by the flyover idea since it should be clear by now that Boston does not like elevated arteries or ramps, and he would undo the mistake at Charlesgate as well. He opposed detouring traffic on to the Esplanade and suggested removing parking from one side of Beacon St. to open a lane for traffic passage during detours.

- Fritz Casselman, a Back Bay resident whose home overlooks the tunnel, said he appreciates the opportunity to be involved in the process. He asked who makes the final choice, who pays for the choice and determines the traffic mitigation scheme. He asked if DCR can get a commitment from the other agencies involved to an open process; in his experience, they are not as willing to be participatory. Commissioner Burrington responded that DCR will make the final design choice after public input and consultation. The City of Boston and Mass. Highway Department (MHD) will make the final decisions about traffic rerouting. The work will be funded through an agreement with MHD to cover several similar bridge projects through state bond funds. Commissioner Burrington added that he believes the other agencies will buy into the process. There is a new highway commissioner and a new set of design guidelines and he believes that these other agencies will join the discussion.
- Robert LaTremouille, Cambridge, suggested that DCR has refused to acknowledge a series of plans for projects along the Charles River. He expressed dismay over the removal of trees along Memorial Drive associated with construction there and said traffic should not be diverted there. Mr. Haglund said that the Memorial Drive project did include some tree taking but it increased green space along the river by removing one lane of traffic. There are plans to make repairs to many of DCR's properties, but they are the subject of public review, like this project. Mr. LaTremouille said he knows there is an MBTA analysis of a project to build on off ramp from the current railroad bridge adjacent to the BU Bridge. Mr. Haglund responded that he was not aware of design work begin undertaken on that bridge.
- Bob O'Brien commended DCR's process and posed several questions about traffic issues. He asked what the tolerance is for reducing traffic on Storrow Drive, perhaps by installing traffic lights to calm Storrow Drive or diverting some of it to the Mass. Turnpike. What are the implications for the Allston Brighton exit and tollbooths? He asked if the project will study the interaction between Back Bay and the Hynes Convention Center and anticipate and manage the real traffic problems that could result from completing the project. Some temporary traffic diversions may become permanent solutions. Mr. Kelley reported that the consultants are working with the Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS) to model where the diverted traffic can go. This work is ongoing, but changes are visible along all of the alternatives, some of which are nearing capacity.
- Rep. Walz added that the slingshot, a U-turn at-grade at the Allston Brighton toll booths, was just approved and she has urged the Turnpike Authority to consider suspending the tolls to improve traffic movement. Cambridge residents have expressed concern about clogging Memorial Drive.
- Steve Young, Beacon Hill resident, suggested that the project offers the opportunity to think regionally about traffic and public transportation and to work with the MBTA and others on improving capacity in the short term, perhaps encouraging long-term behavior changes. Commissioner Burrington replied that DCR is in the Office of Commonwealth Development, which includes transportation, housing and environmental departments. He plans to use this structure to work on linkages and planning.

- Meg Mainzer-Cohen, Executive Director of the Back Bay Association, thanked DCR for its participatory process. She met with the BBA Board members and the organization has sent a letter to Transportation Secretary John Cogliano addressing a number of issues, including the lack of access from the Mass. Turnpike to Back Bay and the failure of improvements from the Big Dig to benefit the Back Bay. Storrow Drive serves as the missing link for access to Back Bay, and the effect of limiting access or restricting traffic entering Back Bay would be cataclysmic for Back Bay businesses. The tunnel project does, however, offer an opportunity for a Win-Win: moving some traffic to the Turnpike and improving access from the airport and points north and west would benefit the project and the Back Bay. Ms. Mainzer-Cohen said there are opportunities to correct mistakes made long ago, to reconnect South Boston to Back Bay and to relieve Storrow Drive of too many fast-moving cars. She hopes that the Boston Department of Transportation will participate in the process and she looks forward to working with DCR.
- Eve Waterfall, a Beacon Hill resident, commended DCR for its process and for the work that has been completed on Memorial Drive to make it greener, slower and nicer. She proposed adding a criterion for the neighborhoods to include controlling traffic volume that results from detours. She said that broken promises have made people distrustful of public project success – mentioning the Cambridge St. and Charles Circle construction, the Big Dig, the Rose Kennedy Greenway. Public projects have been over budget, longer than promised and often marked by insufficient funds to finish things like landscaping. She would like to see a compact between agencies and the public, or funds put in a lock box for finishing, such as landscaping. She also commented on the need for more responsible contractors: Cambridge St. often looks like a garbage dump and the contractor fails to clean up. She encouraged more dependence on public transportation. She would like the planners to avoid the assumption that all of the existing traffic volume has to be accommodated in the selected option – that it can possibly be decreased during construction and a lower volume of traffic maintained on Storrow Drive.
- Denise Thompkins has lived in the 02114 zip code since 1975. She said that city residents have to bear the brunt of decisions made by suburban dwellers and it would be kind if some of the engineers and planners lived and worked in the neighborhood so they could see what the impact of these projects is on the community. Mr. Haglund pointed out the paying for improvements to the tunnel results from the support of the representatives of those communities: Beacon Hill and Back Bay would be hard pressed to pay for the tunnel repairs on their own. Commissioner Burrennton noted that while he does not live in the zip code, he rides his bike to work down the Esplanade, so he will be keeping a close watch on the project.
- Jon Niehof, Metro Boston Chapter of Mass Bike, said he wants to see the Esplanade protected during the construction and supports the parkway option for Storrow Drive. He thinks reducing the traffic volume on Storrow is a positive outcome and he is interested in bicycle access. It is good now along Mugar Way, but not terrific from Back Bay to Cambridge and on many of the ramps.

- A speaker asked if the community can have input into the scope of the traffic study. Mr. Kelley and Mr. Haglund said the data is being collected and analyzed; if the level of analysis appears to be insufficient at the March meetings, the community is invited to make those comments. DCR has already asked the consultant to include destination studies based on the meetings of the last few days.
- A commenter said that DCR should keep the tunnel, put pedestrians on crosswalks, and slow down the traffic.
- Don Carlson said he wanted to echo comments about planning that includes mass transit improvements, making them part of the solution for the traffic challenges during construction, and perhaps permanently.
- A speaker asked if it would be possible to include temporary on and off ramps from the Mass. Turnpike and what the implications for traffic changes are for Mass. Ave. and Newbury Street. Mr. Kelley said he does not have that information yet, but should have more details in March.
- Jeff Rosenblum, Livable Streets Alliance, spoke about the disappearing traffic effect that appeared to take place during construction of the Central Artery. Many people anticipated that the CA/THT construction and traffic detours would bring the city to a halt. The traffic seemed to rearrange itself to some extent, and Mr. Rosenblum urged DCR and the consultants to investigate that phenomenon and to encourage people to use new ways to commute.
- Chris Hart, Adaptive Environments, asked if it was possible to expand the project beyond the current tunnel portals. Doing so could offer more open space. Mr. Haglund said that was a good comment for the MEPA process. Mr. Hart reminded the team to look into the adaptations made for the Democratic National Convention in Boston.
- A speaker asked about the status of the Fiedler Footbridge. Mr. Kelley said that it needs a lot of work, does not meet current standards and does not comply with ADA standards. There will be some kind of access of footbridge, depending on the recommended option.
- A question was posed by an audience member: is the tunnel or parkway option best for the Esplanade? Mr. Kelley said on one hand, the roof of the tunnels could become green space; on the other hand, there isn't sufficient space right now to lay the lanes side by side without digging up part of the Esplanade. So the public will have to see the detailed options this spring to judge the costs versus benefits.
- A commenter asked if paths or walkways could be placed underneath a surface roadway to avoid lights and pedestrian crossings. Mr. Kelley said that most agencies have questions about the security of those kinds of tunnels. They have seldom been successful.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 PM.